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Commission on the Status of Women
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Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century": implementation of strategic objectives and action in critical areas of concern and further actions and initiatives: women's economic empowerment in the changing world of work

Ministerial round table: technology changing the world of work: how can technology and innovation be harnessed to accelerate women's economic empowerment?

Chair's summary

1. On 13 March 2017, the Commission on the Status of Women held a ministerial round table on the topic "Technology changing the world of work: how can technology and innovation be harnessed to accelerate women's economic empowerment?", under the priority theme "Women's economic empowerment in the changing world of work". The participants in the round table exchanged experiences, lessons learned and good practices in relation to the topic with an emphasis on the link between technology, innovation and women's economic empowerment.

2. The Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs of Belarus, Valentin Rybakov, chaired the round table and made an opening statement. Ministers and high-level officials from 16 Member States participated in the round table. The Assistant Secretary-General and Deputy Executive Director of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), Yannick Glemarec, made closing comments and the Chair made a closing statement.

3. Participants emphasized the critical role technology and innovation can play in promoting gender equality and women's empowerment. Participants described legislation, action plans, programmes and other initiatives aimed at promoting

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education and economic opportunities for women in the science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) sectors. Several good practices were identified which may be replicated by other governments.

Promotion of science, technology, engineering and mathematics education to develop skills for women at all levels

4. Participants discussed the importance of ensuring universal digital literacy to equip women and men to participate in and benefit from technology and innovation sectors. The achievement of Sustainable Development Goal 4, on ensuring inclusive and quality education for all and promoting lifelong learning, requires eliminating gender disparities in STEM education and redressing the low participation of women and girls in technology and innovation fields.

5. Participants also noted that women are vastly underrepresented in STEM education, but noted initiatives introduced in some countries. Those include the provision of training on STEM for women and girls, the funding of school programmes and the provision of scholarships and internships to boost women's enrolment in STEM subjects. Other countries have introduced grassroots information and communication technology (ICT) curriculum programmes as well as innovative awards to promote technology among young women and girls and boost STEM training for students from vulnerable backgrounds.

6. Participants also acknowledged and highlighted the role of partnerships in promoting STEM education for women and girls.

Acceleration of job creation for women through technology and innovation

7. Participants discussed the importance of harnessing technology and innovation to improve the economic empowerment of women through the leveraging of digital financial services. Participants noted the progress made in several countries in promoting women's access to financial resources through digital financial services and in connecting rural women to markets using mobile device-based services.

8. Reformed regulatory guidelines that offer online business registration services to women have been successful. Participants noted that digital solutions have simplified the process of starting and registering a business venture for women entrepreneurs.

9. In some countries, online compendiums of skills enable women to go online and research employment opportunities in socioprofessional categories.

Gender stereotypes

10. Participants emphasized the sociocultural barriers women and girls encounter when choosing a career in ICT and STEM. The lack of representation of women in ICT and STEM sectors was one such challenge. Participants observed that women and girl students pursuing STEM subjects lack successful women professional role models. Women role models in ICT and STEM sectors can encourage students to pursue an advanced education in ICT and develop their own career paths in those sectors. To dismantle that barrier, some countries offer field tours and lectures by researchers and technology experts to expose students to women leaders in technology and innovation.

11. Participants further noted that conservative cultures need to promote a favourable learning environment for STEM subjects that will encourage girls in school. To boost the enabling environment for girls, bilateral cooperation at the regional level on teacher training in technology sectors is vital to the promotion of ICT.

12. Participants also noted that, given the existence of stereotypes, promoting women in science and technology leadership is a priority. Various projects aimed at promoting women leadership in science were cited as examples.

13. Participants acknowledged that technology can also be leveraged to tackle stereotypes. Many countries use social media and "hackathons" to promote positive messages related to gender equality and women's empowerment and to disseminate information aimed at addressing violence against women.

Flexible work arrangements

14. Participants discussed the potential of technology to help retain the talents of women in the workplace by offering them flexible work options such as work from home policies, part-time work arrangements and remote work options. Those modalities allow women the freedom to also fulfil their care responsibilities at home.

15. Participants noted that flexible work arrangements are important to encourage balance between work and family life. They shared the progress being made in addressing the imbalance, which includes legal reforms on flexibility in workplaces that target both the public and private sectors.

Internet security and cyberbullying

16. While participants shared a commitment to ensuring that technology and innovation are embedded in government policies and programmes, some participants highlighted that special attention needs to be given to prevent technology-related violence against women. Participants noted that combating cyberbullying contributes to creating a safe and secure environment for women and girls in every sphere of life. In that regard, participants noted the efforts of some countries to address technological abuse in online space in order to establish a functional online mechanism to protect and empower women.